



Remote River Expeditions

Madagascar

Country & River Trip Information

General Information

A. Visas, vaccinations, customs, money

Visas: A Visa application form, with instructions and recommendations, will be included with your trip documents. Visas are also obtainable upon arrival in Antananarivo.

Vaccinations: Please see notes on the Visa application. Yellow fever required for those coming from countries where yellow fever exists. Ask your doctor's advice for other vaccinations and considerations, keeping in mind that recommendations change often. Please remember to carry your yellow card with your passport when you travel.

Customs: Remote River's staff will be on hand at the airport when you arrive. Those bringing in a video camera or other electronic gear are advised to show it to the customs official who will note the details on your passport or currency declaration form, thus avoiding possible hassles at exit. In general, the airport staff is easy-going, but some vestiges of a stricter and bureaucratic past still remain. Export of wildlife products, orchids, etc. is strictly prohibited.

Money: In March 2005, the rate was about 7,600 Malagasy Ariary / US\$. Traveler's checks can be changed at banks and leading hotels. Credit cards are accepted at some hotels and at Air Madagascar. (American Express is the easiest card to use.) Some cards (AMEX) can be used, with a personal check, to buy up to US\$1000 of traveler's checks at one bank in Antananarivo. Cash withdrawals using credit cards are also possible.

B. Weather, clothing.

Weather: April-November is the dry season in central and western Madagascar, and skies are a brilliant blue, with varying cloud cover. In Tana (Antananarivo), min and max mean monthly temps for this period are between 9 C - 24 C; on the west coast, the corresponding figures are from 19 C to 32 C in Majunga and from 13 C to 31 C in Tulear.

Clothing: Antananarivo is a casual city, and only a few restaurants have any dress restrictions. The nights can be cool; a leather jacket, wool sports jacket, or some kind of pile or synchilla jacket or pullover will be handy. A complete clothing and equipment list will be included in your trip documents.

C. In towns: Hotels, Food, Tips, Communications & Post, Security, Shopping

Hotels: Le Domaine d'Hotes Irina is a wonderful garden hotel looking out over rice fields, only 7 minutes from the airport. At times we will use other hotels in Antananarivo as well. In the smaller towns, hotel standards vary, but local hotels usually make up for in charm and character what they may lack in luxury. In Morondava, Ifaty, and Majunga, accommodations are right on the beach, often in individual bungalows.



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Food: Antananarivo has a wide collection of outstanding restaurants, from funky local to very smart, with French, Chinese, Italian, and Malagasy cuisine. Outside of Tana, even very small local places can set out memorable meals, prepared from varied and flavorful ingredients freshly bought at the market. The Malagasy Three Horses Beer is excellent, local wines can be good, and brands of local rum range from the dangerous Turbo II to the distinguished Cazanove and Mangoustan.

Tipping: At restaurants, a tip of 5 -7 % is standard, if service is not included in the bill. For portorage, 1000 FMG per bag is a rough guide.

Communications and Post: Telephones in Antananarivo work well, and calling outside has become very convenient too, with card phones installed by an American company. The post office has a complicated rate schedule, but most hotels can advise, and also provide stamps.

Contacts in Madagascar:

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The Madagascar Airtours office is on l'Avenue de l'Independence next to the Air Madagascar office.

Security: In general, Madagascar enjoys a pleasant state of peace and calm. It's only in the cities that the presence of pickpockets and nighttime muggers necessitate precautions, especially on the busy market days. For visits to the markets and strolls in Antananarivo, it is advisable to leave jewelry in safekeeping at the hotel, and taxis should be taken after dark. Valuables should never be casually left in hotel rooms, where they can prove to be an irresistible temptation.

Shopping: In Tana, attractive and inexpensive handicrafts abound, and can be bargained for at the Market Artisanale on the Dike road or along the arcades of L'Avenue de l'Independance Woven mats and baskets, horn boxes, solitaire sets, wood carvings, precious stones, hats, embroidered tablecloth sets, antique brass lamps are just some of the popular items. Markets in Antsirabe, Fianarantsoa, Morondava, and smaller road towns are also worthy of exploration, and make for great photographic opportunities.

Poverty, Beggars & Gift Giving: Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world and to be blunt the impact can at times be overwhelming. This is especially true for first time visitors. There are a great many beggars on the streets, especially in Antananarivo and the affect may be alarming.

Generally we discourage visitors from giving gifts (pens, candy, money, etc.) to the children and beggars on the street. It contributes to creating an even greater beggar mentality and often invites unwelcome attention. That said, and to be honest, many people do keep a small amount on hand and hand out at times to the severely handicapped and elderly. Consider bringing pictures of your family and home or postcards to share with locals. In rural areas pens/pencils and writing paper make reasonable gifts, as well.

Along with providing cultural exchange, our tours contribute to the Madagascar's economy in a positive way by employee locals and hiring services in-country. RRE contributes directly to several aid organizations and we encourage anyone that



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would like to contribute to do so directly to a charity group that is assisting in Madagascar. Please refer to the links page on our website or request a copy of our aid organization list.

Madagascar at a Glance

- 1000 miles long, larger than California (slightly smaller than as Texas)
 - 80% of all floral and fauna endemic
 - 95% endemic in the spiny forest area of the southwest
 - Lemurs, 30 Species, found only on the island
 - 100 Mammals, all endemic (except bats and introduced)
 - Birds: 250 breeding Species (130 endemic species)
 - 8,000 Species of flowering plants, over 1,000 native orchids
 - 6 entire Families of flowering
 - 150 species of frogs, all endemic
 - More than ½ the world's chameleons
(70 cm to thumbnail size)
- 200 Species of reptiles, 90% endemic (and no poisonous snakes!)





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Madagascar River Trips

Wildlife, scenery, people, camping, typical day on the river...

Wildlife: On the *Tsiribihina*, *Mangoky*, and *Manambolo* Rivers we see Red-fronted lemurs and subspecies of Verreaux's sifaka by day (and Ring-tails on the *Mangoky*), both from the boats and on forest walks, and go out to spot nocturnal species after dark. The forests along the *Mahavavy* support an amazing density of red-fronted brown lemurs, crowned sifaka, and Decken's sifaka. In the National Parks and Reserves we also enjoy an extensive variety of endemic Malagasy species.

Birds: The birds are a continuous source of entertainment, with many herons, ducks, and forest species too. We may see as many as 100 different species, and have had great sightings of the very rare Madagascar fish eagle on the *Mahavavy*, *Manambolo* and *Tsiribihina* rivers. Other endemics such as vangas, cuckoo-rollers, and Vasa parrots are frequently seen.

Amphibians & Reptiles: Chameleons, geckos, skinks, and spiders can be colorful and fascinating too. Happily, there are no poisonous snakes in Madagascar. Crocodiles have been nearly hunted to extinction; rarely do we encounter small crocs which do not pose a threat.

Scenery: The *Manambolo* cuts through the Bemaraha (Stingy) Plateau in a spectacular vertical-sided gorge, whose walls are heavily forested, wherever the trees can gain a foothold. The *Tsiribihina* gorges are less dramatic, but share with the *Manambolo* the presence of several amazingly beautiful streams with waterfalls, limestone staircases, deep blue-green pools, and feathery palms. The *Mangoky* has fewer gorge sections but is blessed with a great expanse of almost untouched dry forest, with many baobabs, and other picturesque trees. Many blue tributaries of the *Mahavavy* and *Mangoky* remain to be explored, and there are extensive forests with many baobabs. The road north of Morondava is famous for its water-lily pools and the avenue of baobabs, while the dry spiny forest between the Mangoky and Tulear is equally photogenic.

People: While driving overland and on the river we pass isolated hamlets and small villages, where the local Malagasy cultivate rice, cassava, and bananas, and keep cattle. We have the chance to meet and exchange the news, and maybe buy some fresh fruit, and our encounters have always been easy-going and pleasant. We enjoy local musical gatherings in some villages.

Camping: Campsites are usually huge sandbars, offering smooth clean tent sites with lots of privacy, with the forest nearby for exploring. Bathing is a pleasure in the warm river water, and laundry dries quickly in the sunny dry air. All river and camping equipment is provided. We use four-man North Face and Eureka tents, with two clients per tent. They are well-ventilated, insect-proof domes or A-frames. Thermarest-type sleeping mattresses and sleeping sheets and blankets are provided. See packing list for details of what you need to bring.

Meals: Meals are served buffet-style served on a table. All our trips offer excellent cuisine featuring fresh fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy products along with bread, pies, and cakes baked in a well-embered Dutch oven. Woven mats arranged around a campfire provide a comfortable resting place, for meals and socializing.

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Paddling: Most people find this good exercise and a real tonic. Once in a while, a stiff upstream breeze can make it hard work, but usually we paddle in an easy, relaxed rhythm, and the paddle can be put down at any time, to look at a bird, write up some notes, etc. On some rivers, depending on water level we bring along a small outboard motor to speed our advance downstream which allows for more hiking and camp time.


Typical Day on the River

In keeping with the “mora-mora” (“slowly – slowly”) aspect of Madagascar the pace throughout all our trips is relaxed and unhurried. Most of us enjoy an early wake up (its light at 6), and the crew gets a fire going for breakfast. After breakfast, clean-up, breaking camp, pack up, and a quick bath, we are usually ready to head downstream by 10:00. We paddle in a leisurely way, taking advantage of some side stream beds that offer particularly inviting walks. At midday, we find a shady place for a lunch of fruit, bread, and sandwich fixings. We continue after lunch for an hour or two, generally stopping to camp between 3:00 and 4:00. Then its time to unpack the boats, set up the tents, collect firewood and explore the area around camp. After dinner and some campfire time, 9:00 will see most of us off for a tranquil sleep in the refreshing cool night air.

ITINERARY NOTES

Although we will do our very best to adhere to the itinerary schedule as listed, it is subject to change for numerous reasons beyond our control. Starting point of river trips may vary somewhat depending on weather and road conditions. If the trip is delayed because of bad weather, cancelled or delayed flights or delays on other modern transportation, sickness, or other situation for which Remote River Expeditions or its agents cannot make provisions, the cost of delays is not included.





Remote River Expeditions
"Pioneers of floating safaris in Madagascar, Ethiopia, Tanzania
* Unique multi-activity journeys *
Small group and family vacations in exotic locations"

